



National Engineering Honor Society

TAU BETA PI

News

July 27, 1998

FOR RELEASE
OCTOBER 1, 1998

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Tau Beta Pi Announces 1998 Laureates

Tau Beta Pi, the National Engineering Honor Society, has named two Laureates in the Association's annual program to recognize gifted engineering students who have excelled in areas beyond their technical majors.

The 1998 Tau Beta Pi Laureates are: **Guang-Ien Cheng**, 1997 and 1998 graduate in computer science and electrical engineering of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, lauded for his diverse achievements; and **Jonathan M. Owens**, 1998 graduate in mechanical engineering of the University of Alabama, also feted for his diverse accomplishments. They join 45 other outstanding Tau Bates who have been named Laureates since 1982.

The Laureate Program exists to further Tau Beta Pi's second basic purpose as stated in the Association's Constitution: ". . . to *foster a spirit of liberal culture in engineering colleges.*" The primary concern of the society is to recognize students of superior scholarship and exemplary character and to honor eminent practicing engineers. The society also encourages excellence in engineering education and in the ethical practice of engineering.

The Tau Beta Pi Laureates will be honored on October 10, 1998, at the 93rd annual Convention to be held in Manhattan, Kansas. Executive Councillors will present each winner with a \$2,500 cash award and a commemorative plaque. Their biographies follow:

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Guang-Ien Cheng's distinct diversity of interests were evidenced early in his love for reading, his academic excellence in mathematics, and his participation in Chinese school, where he learned Mandarin, martial arts, traditional dances, and produced a newsletter called the *Dragon Journal*.

Ien's contributions to liberal culture at MIT have been equally wide ranging. He entered the institute in 1993 and graduated four years later with a B.S. in computer science and minors in mathematics and creative writing. He studied algorithms, complexity theory, probability theory, multi-threaded parallelism, A.I., software engineering, signal processing, computer architecture, and digital microprocessor electronics. This past spring he earned a master's degree in electrical engineering and computer science.

Ien loves to teach; he has tutored, graded, written problem sets for algorithms class, and served as a graduate teaching assistant. He tells his introduction to computer science class students that "you need to know something about poetry before you can write good programs."

Besides his responsibilities in the EECS department, he has volunteered in several settings, teaching verbal skills for SAT preparation in Boston's Chinatown and remedial math one summer in an urban Washington, DC, high school. For the past three spring breaks, he has taught science and technology classes in urban schools in the Bronx, NY, Patterson, NJ, and San Juan, PR.

But it is at the nexus of science and the humanities that his talents are illuminated. He is passionate about literature, enjoys writing, and is a bibliophile. The institute's school of humanities selects a group of 25 promising sophomores and juniors to be Burchard scholars; Ien was one. In his senior year he won both Kelly prizes for the best research essays in the humanities — one for his paper on "Experiencing Donne's *An Anatomy of the World*" and his essay on "The Catholic Church and Human Evolution." His personal essay on the delights of writing, "Red Mechanical Pencil," won the 1995 Alpha Delta Phi library competition in nonfiction. Ien's paper "On Learning to Read Spanish Poetry" and some of his own poems were published in the campus literary magazine *Rune*.

Ien has helped edit a book on poverty being written by the director of the Boston Rescue Mission; he volunteered there weekly from 1994-96. For the Tau Beta Pi Massachusetts Beta Chapter, he drafted a declaration of values which each member affirms preceding their initiation, and he created a hymn of praise entitled "The Engineer's Song."

Sharing his love for diversity, he cofounded the institute's Leonardo di Vinci dinner series, which features fine international cuisine and faculty lecturers who present topics as wide ranging as physics, wines, architecture, chess, biotechnology, and poetry. Last spring, he assumed full responsibility for managing the dinners, which reached an attendance of 100.

Ien is among 38 American students chosen as 1998 British Marshall scholars. He will spend his two-year award studying at Cambridge University, earning a B.A. degree in English literature. Afterwards, he may join his love for the humanities and computer engineering in yet another incarnation, such as electronic publishing, higher-education administration, or an occupation involving the history of science and technology.

Alabama Beta Chapter President, NATO delegate, founder of the university's French Club, academic achiever — are all accolades attributed to Jonathan M. Owens, 1998 Laureate from Pell City, Alabama. He mastered the challenges of college after he attended a statewide magnet school for mathematics and science in Mobile, where he studied with other motivated 16-year-olds. The experience of leaving his hometown near Birmingham and living in a newly organized boarding school was a turning point in his growth and gave him a broader sense of the world.

Entering the University of Alabama, he immersed himself in student affairs, joining the 1996 Atlantic Council, a think tank on issues involving NATO and the U.S. role in international issues. The council, part of the Atlantic Treaty Association, which includes all NATO countries and those interested in joining, met in Washington, DC, where Jonathan was a state delegate. Delegates discussed NATO expansion and the war in Bosnia with leaders from NATO countries and former Soviet satellites. He presented his thoughts so well during the Washington discussion series that he was one of only two student delegates invited to attend the International Atlantic Treaty Association Conference in Rome, Italy. While there, he became knowledgeable about current NATO issues and served on the education committee. He translated some of the conference speeches from French into English for review by a faculty member.

After re-acquainting himself with the French language, he returned to campus and founded the French Club which fostered conversation at a local coffee house, initiated a special lecture series in French history and culture, and organized a French film festival for students campuswide. He became an actor and portrayed the French scientist Copernicus, explaining the heliocentric theory of Ptolemy on Public Television's *Integrated Science*, a program for fifth and sixth graders.

His wide-ranging interests involved him in the Other Club, an Oxford-style dinner/debate society, and the Blackburn Institute, a think tank for the state of Alabama which deals with local, national, and international issues. He presented two papers for the institute, one dealing with NATO and the Internet and the other with his state's global industries. He joined the Capstone Round Table, which brings together faculty and students to discuss various topics, and he helped found the Victorian Society, modeled after one at Oxford. His concern for others also involved projects for the handicapped.

A mechanical engineering major, Jonathan designed and built a permanent wheelchair ramp for the poor and elderly in the Tuscaloosa area, even creating a portable ramp for a historical home. Using finite-element analysis, he designed seating systems to alleviate decubitus ulcers, an annoyance for those confined to wheelchairs.

During 1996-97, Jonathan was selected along with a cross section of campus leaders to be a member of Leadership Hall, which he served as house manager. He was instrumental in starting tutoring sessions for the campus English Language Institute and helped expand the congress medal program in area high schools.

In 1997, Jonathan received the 1997 Tau Beta Pi senior achievement award and the Penny Allen award for service to students.

Tau Beta Pi, the world's largest engineering society, has initiated 423,000 members since it was founded in 1885. Headquartered in Knoxville, Tennessee, the Association has 220 active collegiate chapters and 13 active alumnus chapters throughout the country.